



Jornades de Foment de la Investigació

**DO SPANISH
SPEAKERS AT
CONFERENCE
PRESENTATIONS
USE *BIEN* AND *BUENO*
IN THE SAME WAY
ENGLISH SPEAKERS
DO WITH *WELL*?**

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This study provides a contrastive analysis of paper presentations conducted in English and Spanish, namely, regarding the pragmatic marker “well” and its Spanish counterparts “bien” and “bueno” as pause-fillers in an academic context. This analysis is based on the study of these markers in conference lectures by Bellés-Fortuño and Fortanet-Gómez (forthcoming). The classification selected is the one proposed by Bellés-Fortuño (2008) for discourse markers. Finally, differences and similarities in the results obtained from both studies are discussed.

The corpus under study is made of 2 spoken paper presentation transcripts from two conferences in the field of linguistics, one in Spanish and the other one in English.

The North-American English conference presentation transcript has been taken from the John Swales Conference Corpus (JSCC), a collection of transcripts from an academic conference on Discourse Analysis that took place at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (MI) in June 2006 to celebrate the official retirement of Professor John Swales. This corpus supplements the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE).

The Spanish part of the corpus is a conference presentation transcript from the II Congreso de Lengua y Sociedad (II Conference of Language and Society), recorded at Universitat Jaume I, Castellón (Spain) in September 2006 as part of the MASC (Multimodal Academic Spoken Corpus) by the Group for Research on Academic and Professional English (GRAPE).

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to compare the pragmatic marker “well” and its Spanish counterparts “bien” and “bueno” as pause-fillers in conference presentations. The following paper is structured in four parts. In this section, the theoretical framework of discourse analysis is reviewed, including the notion of genre and similar analyses to this one that have been conducted previously. Once established the theoretical framework, the next section is devoted to explain the method followed, which is based on the comparison of two corpora of conference presentations, one in English and one in Spanish, with a contrastive linguistic approach. In the third section, the results observed are discussed and examples are provided. Finally, in the last section I will compare my results with the ones obtained by Bellés-Fortuño and Fortanet-Gómez in their study of the discourse marker “well” in English and its Spanish translation equivalents “bien”, “bueno” in academic lectures. Also in this section, my conclusions and the implications of this study will be explored.

To start with, it is important to emphasize that the English language has become the global language for communication in the twenty-first century. One of the fields where English is dominant is the academic world, not only because of the increase of university exchange programmes (e.g. Erasmus-Socrates), but also because of its supremacy as the language of research. Thus, in order to have access to this academic world and the information provided in it, students and researchers, each of them from different backgrounds, need to know this language.

On the other hand, along with the hegemony of English, there are languages like Spanish, German and French that are also present in international exchanges. It is worth mentioning the case of Spanish, a language that, being the official language in Spain and many countries of South America, is the third language in the world according to its number of speakers, only preceded by Chinese and English. As a matter of fact, the use of Spanish is increasing dramatically in English-speaking countries like the United States, being especially popular among students in North-American universities. Thus, English and Spanish for Academic Purposes courses and materials need to be designed for students of these languages as a second or foreign language.

Academic discourse covers a wide variety of genres, among them those involving oral discourse. In the figure below, there is the classification of oral academic genres proposed by Fortanet (2005):

Do spanish speakers at conference presentations use *bien* and *bueno* in the same way english speakers do with *well*?

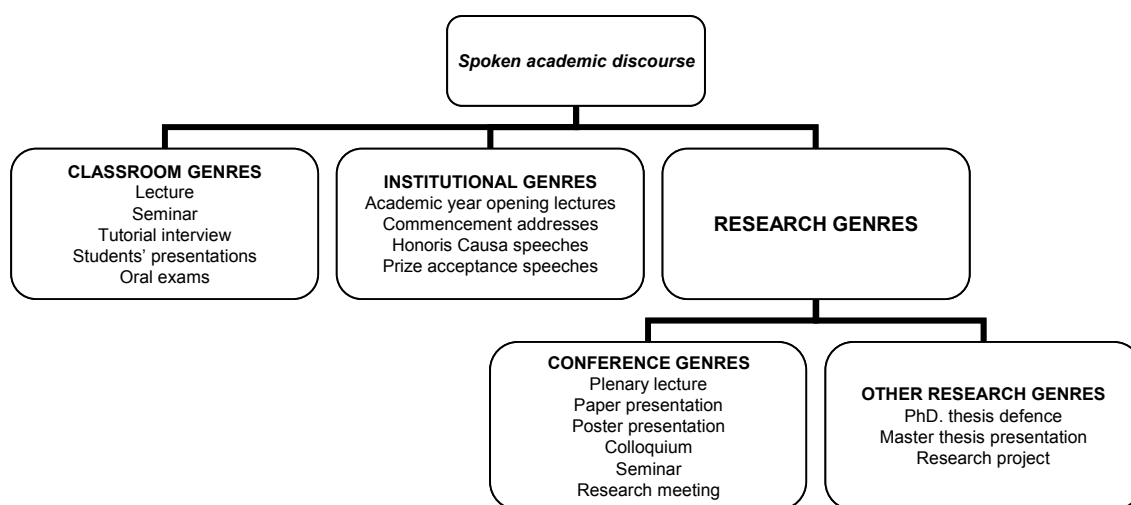


Figure 1: Classification of oral academic genres. (Fortanet 2005)

Swales has defined genre focusing on the relationship between text and discourse community:

A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert member of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and styles. (Swales 1990:58)

One of these genres is conference presentations. Paper presentations may be presented in a different way in different speaking communities.

Analysing such genres in different languages is an important way to create materials in order to facilitate students' comprehension of these genres in a foreign language context. Many researchers have emphasized this point. For example, when talking about lecture research, Flowerdew (1994-14) points out that:

[it] can indicate to teachers and course designers what linguistic and discorsal features learners need to be familiar with in order to understand a lecture and what, therefore, should be incorporated into ESL courses. In addition a knowledge of the linguistic/ discorsal structure of lectures will be of value to content lecturers in potentially enabling them to structure their own lectures in an optimally effective way.

However, not only is it important to compare grammar, but also discourse markers (DMs). Actually, previous studies like Kintsch and Yarbrough's (1982), stress the fact that it is easier to answer gist and main-idea questions for texts that include evident rhetorical cues (discourse markers) than for those that do not.

Biber et al. (2004: 454-456) define the concept of DM as "a type of insert used in conversation. It signals interactively how the speaker plans to steer the dialogue: *now, here's some ...*", understanding inserts as "stand-alone words such as *oh, okay, or well* that are not part of any larger syntactic unit". Thus, this study focuses on the use of the pragmatic marker "well" in English and its Spanish counterparts "bien" and "bueno". Previous studies have also compared the use of these markers. This is the case of Bellés-Fortuño and Fortanet-Gómez's (forthcoming) analysis in the genre of lecture. Their study is based on the DMs classification model proposed by Bellés-Fortuño (2007). The importance of such a model lies in its validity for English, Spanish and other languages.

MICRO-MARKERS

Internal (ideational) relations

Additional	Temporal	Causal	Contrastive	Consecutive
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MACRO-MARKERS

Overall discourse structural relations

Starter	Rephraser	Organizer	Topic-shifter	Conclusion
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OPERATORS

Relation speaker-speech

Relation speaker-hearer

Attitudinal	Pause filler		Elicitation	Acceptance	Confirmation
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Figure 2: Bellés-Fortuño's (2008) DM classification model

Bellés-Fortuño (2008) classifies DMs according to internal relations (micro-markers), overall discourse structural relations (macro-markers), and the relation between the speaker and speech and between the speaker and the hearer (operators). Operators are also called pragmatic markers (See Figure 2).

Do spanish speakers at conference presentations use *bien* and *bueno* in the same way english speakers do with *well*?

Bellés-Fortuño and Fortanet-Gómez (forthcoming) analysed “well” as a pause-filler and compared it to the use of “bien” and “bueno” in the Spanish corpus. Regarding “well” as a pause-filler, they found that it usually comes after pauses or hesitators such as “um”, “uh”. They also point out that the number of instances of “well” is slightly lower than in the case of “bueno” and “bien”.

As for the Spanish pragmatic markers “bien” and “bueno”, Bellés-Fortuño and Fortanet-Gómez (forthcoming) observed that, in terms of frequency, these markers are used indistinctly as pause-fillers. Nevertheless, they comment that, relying on their intuition as Spanish speakers and as reported in the literature on Translation Theory, that, as they point out, has traditionally focused on individual written text analysis and how to establish principles or rules for translation, they expected ‘bien’ to be one of the best matching translation equivalents. Moreover, in most cases the uses of “bueno” and “bien” implied preceding or following rising/falling intonations.

When analysing discourse marker’s collocations, i.e. units that co-occur together, they found three markers of the same category (pause-fillers) co-occurring (“okay well”, “bueno pues”, “pues bien”). They say that this fact emphasizes the pragmatic marker’s function.

In their study, Bellés-Fortuño and Fortanet-Gómez conclude that “well” has at least two translation equivalents in Spanish lectures when used as a pause-filler pragmatic marker.

METHOD

The purpose of this study is to analyse the genre of paper presentations in different speaking communities. Therefore, this study provides a contrastive analysis of paper presentations conducted in English and Spanish, specifically regarding the pragmatic marker “well” and its Spanish counterparts “bien” and “bueno” in an academic context.

With that aim, a contrastive linguistics approach has been implemented. Such an approach brings out features of a language A or a language B that would not have come to light in a monolingual analysis (Salkie 1997).

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Taking into account features such as the number of words and recording duration in both corpora, these aspects are equivalent, which make the presentations comparable, as can be seen in Table 1.

	Number of words	Time
Spanish paper presentation	4, 413	30 mins. 32 sec.
English paper presentation	3,937	27 mins. 23 sec.

Table 1: Total number of words and time in the paper presentations analysed.

As for participants, the students and researchers involved in both presentations are native speakers of the language. However, the Spanish paper presentation includes words in other languages such as Catalan (co-official language in Castellón), English (in quotations), and Frisian and Leonés (the languages that are analysed in the paper).

In order to compare the results of this study on conference presentations with the ones observed by Bellés-Fortuño and Fortanet-Gómez (forthcoming) in their analysis of lectures, I decided to replicate the same classification.

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RESULTS

Results for “well” have shown a total of 3 occurrences of this word as a pause-filler operator with less than 1‰ frequency rate as can be observed in Table 2.

Pause-filler	# DMs	‰
<i>well</i>	3	0.76

Table 2 ‘well’ pause-filler operators results in the English paper presentation

As in Bellés-Fortuño and Fortanet-Gómez’s (forthcoming) study, expressions such as “as well”, “as well as”, or the use of “well” as an adverb as in “very well”, or as an adjective, were disregarded because they do not work as pause-filler operators.

Regarding the context, there was one instance of “well” after a pause, one as the first word and one in the middle of the utterance. There are no relevant collocations of this DM.

well

1. to do. ok. so, um, what is persuasion, *well*, persuasion is trying to bring your listener to accept your point of view, your ideas or even to change their course of action. so um
2. *well* yes </OVERLAP> because it seems to me that some
3. um i _when_ you were talking about genre bending i was thinking *well* is ours a case of genre bending, and

Moving to the analysis of the Spanish corpus, the results have shown that “bueno” and “bien” as pause-filler operators are more often used in the Spanish conference presentation, as shown in the frequency rates (1.13‰ for “bueno” and 2.04‰ for “bien”) than its translation equivalent in English. Instances of “bueno” and “bien” as adverbs, adjectives, correlative conjunctions (“bien...bien”) and as part of expressions such as “más bien” were taken away. However, unlike its equivalent in the English transcript, “muy bien” was considered a pause-filler because of its context of appearance.

Pause-filler	# DMs	‰
<i>bueno</i>	5	1.13
<i>bien</i>	9	2.04
TOTAL	14	3.17

Table 3 ‘bueno’ and ‘bien’ pause-filler operators results in the Spanish paper presentation

Do spanish speakers at conference presentations use *bien* and *bueno* in the same way english speakers do with *well*?

Moreover, the majority of instances of “bien” and “bueno” as a pause-filler occurred after pauses indicating falling intonation (e.g. to mark the end of a sentence or a change of topic) or as starters, either at the beginning of a speech or an intervention in the discussion part. As for collocations, it is important to emphasize “bueno pues” and “pues bueno”.

bien

1. <U WHO=RSP> (PAUSE DUR=:06) *bien*, *pues*, *eh*, esta ponencia_en esta ponencia vamos a analizar, el caso de la normalización, o mejor dicho de la estandarización del
2. dirigirse a la administración pública en friso, pero, el friso del norte no es oficial. *bien*, *eh*, la estandarización, devenida de otra llamado

bueno

1. <U WHO=S1-m>pues, *bueno*, temo que, a pesar de lo interesante que parece que haya resultado, la ponencia, profesor, pero tenemos un horario que cumplir
2. eh, el leonés tendrá una muerte cierta. *bueno*, hemos acabado, muchas gracias.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The present study provides a contrastive analysis of the pragmatic marker “well” in English and its Spanish counterparts “well” and “bien” in conference presentations. All throughout this paper, references to the analysis of these markers in lectures by Bellés-Fortuño and Fortanet-Gómez (forthcoming) have been made. Thus, common and different results of both studies are compared in this section and reasons for those differences are explored.

Experimental results obtained in both studies show that the frequency rates of “well” are similar (1% approximately). With regard to “bien” and “bueno”, these markers had a higher frequency rate than “well” in both studies. Moreover, most cases implied preceding or following rising/falling intonations both in Spanish conference presentations and lectures. The collocations observed were exactly the same in both studies: “bueno pues” and “pues bueno”.

In spite of common results, differences were also observed. As for “well”, Bellés-Fortuño and Fortanet-Gómez (forthcoming) showed that “okay well” was the most common collocation and it normally occurred at the beginning of a speaker’s utterance. In contrast, in this study one instance was found after a pause, one as the first word in an utterance, and one in the middle of an utterance, but no examples of the collocation “okay well” were found.

Do spanish speakers at conference presentations use *bien* and *bueno* in the same way english speakers do with *well*?

Concerning “bien” and “bueno”, Bellés-Fortuño and Fortanet-Gómez (forthcoming) found that “bueno” and “bien” as pause-filler operators were equally used, whereas in this study, frequency rates show that “bien” is preferred to “bueno”. Actually, this is the result expected by Bellés-Fortuño and Fortanet-Gómez (forthcoming).

An additional aspect observed in this study is that “bueno” is preferred to “bien” to mark the end of the presentation and the discussion part (see example 4).

The different results of both studies are not surprising, and they are connected, in my opinion, with the genres analysed (conference lectures vs. paper presentations), the number of examples (12 transcripts vs 2 transcripts), and the strategies used by the speakers (explaining vs half-reading). I could contrast the strategies used thanks to one of the innovations that characterise the MASC, i.e. it is a multimodal corpus. This means that it includes not only transcriptions, as other corpora do, but also video and audio recordings. These features allow for a deep analysis of the situation in which the genre analysed develops.

One could conclude from these results that, unlike the English academic world, there is a tendency to read in the Spanish academic world, as exemplified in the half-read conference presentation in Spanish analysed here. The results also revealed that, even when a conference presentation is read, speakers need time to think, time to read, and time to change the slides. The latter could explain why the pragmatic markers in Spanish were used as starters. The effect is a higher frequency of discourse markers as pause-fillers in Spanish.

However, as Bellés-Fortuño and Fortanet-Gómez (forthcoming) explain in their study, it is worth noting that this applies also to English conference presentations and lectures: “Pause-fillers are in these cases used as lecturers’ resources and strategies. (...) Both Spanish and North-American lecturers need time to think and pause, even to breathe for a while and go ahead with the lecture delivery.” Pedagogically speaking, both native Spanish and English students and lecturers can benefit from this study. Lecturers will be able to create more reliable materials to help their students develop strategies to understand this genre and also communicate in a natural way in an academic context in the future.

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